

# U.S. HOPEFUL ON RELEASE OF AMERICANS

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## Optimism Of Officials Grows On Move By Castro

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Washington, Dec. 26 (AP)—United States officials held growing optimism today that more than twenty Americans long held in Cuban jails may be released.

This was based on reports from James B. Donovan, New York lawyer who arranged for the pre-Christmas return of the captives of the 1961 Cuban invasion. Prime Minister Fidel Castro has promised to discuss early release of the Americans too.

Washington informants said the United States Government also is pressing for release of the Americans to the Swiss Embassy in Havana. The Swiss represent United States interests in Cuba in the absence of diplomatic relations between Washington and Havana.

### Not In Invasion Force

The imprisoned Americans were not in the April (1961) Bay of Pigs invasion force. They have been held on a variety of charges, both political and criminal.

State Department authorities said they do not know the exact number because of incomplete information on who is now imprisoned and uncertainty concerning the citizenship status of some of the prisoners. Press reports have used the figure 23.

Lincoln White, State Department press officer, said Donovan is "acting as a humanitarian to get people out of jail," but is not a United States Government representative.

### Shuns Direct Dealings

The Government took a similar stand on Donovan's activities in connection with the release of the Cuban invasion prisoners. The Kennedy Administration supported the prisoner release effort back in 1961, but it has shunned direct

dealings with Castro. United States policy is to ostracize him.

Available Washington sources said they do not know of any ransom price demanded by Castro for the American prisoners. He got \$53,000,000 in food and medicine for the 1,113 Cubans.

It was speculated that Castro might offer to trade the Americans for Cubans arrested in New York on spy charges. Donovan earlier arranged with the Russians to swap Francis Gary Powers, U-2 pilot, who crashed in the Soviet Union, for Rudolph Abel, convicted Russian spy.

### Prestige Gesture Eyed

It was theorized also that Castro might be willing to set the Americans free as part of a grandstand gesture to win prestige in Latin America.

United States authorities kept a close watch on the continuing exodus of Russians from Cuba. Their assessment so far is that the military personnel associated with the withdrawn Russian offensive weapons—missiles and jet bombers—are leaving but that others are still in Cuba.

An authorized State Department source estimated today that around 12,000 Soviet military troops and technicians remain in Cuba.

He said a number of Soviet technicians brought their families to Cuba with them. There is no way of knowing now whether the men aboard a Russian passenger liner which left Havana last night were the husbands of the departing women and children on the same ship or were from other military units, he said.

United States officials do not seem inclined to link Castro's prisoner release directly with the current Kremlin peace offensive. They said Castro had his own reasons for the deal—mainly a strong need for medicines.

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